

NEW HAMPSHIRE  
*SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL*  
PROGRAM

Application Guidelines



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## **Program Mission**

As its name suggests, the purpose of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is to encourage children in kindergarten through eighth grade, including those with disabilities, to safely walk or ride bicycles to school.

## **Background**

SRTS is authorized under federal legislation known as the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users or "SAFETEA-LU." New Hampshire will receive \$1 million per year for five years, most of which will be used to reimburse approved local expenses for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.

At the state level, the N.H. Department of Transportation (DOT) administers the program in consultation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

The potential advantages of walking and bike riding are significant and long lasting. Children who develop an

appreciation of physical activity are more likely to remain active into adulthood.

A study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has shown a dramatic decline in the number of children who walk or ride bikes even short distances to school. This correlates with an epidemic in childhood obesity and the associated risks for diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma and cancers. Meanwhile, roads around many of our schools have become congested, wasting fuel and adding to air pollution.

To encourage increased physical activity, the SRTS program works with local schools and their surrounding communities to identify and overcome barriers to safe biking and walking. Schools and their community partners across the state will compete for funding available for projects ranging from bike safety courses to sidewalk construction.

### **A collaborative approach**

A successful SRTS program at the local level requires collaboration among entities that often work independently of each other. This is why the creation of a local SRTS

task force is so important. Communities that reach consensus on projects will tend to fare well when applications are evaluated.

At a minimum, applications **must** include letters of support from both school boards and a municipal body with authority to enter into a binding agreement (e.g. the city council, board of aldermen, board of selectmen or their designee).

Possibilities for a local task force include school administrators, principals, school nurses and physical education teachers, students, municipal planners, public works officials, police representatives, walking, biking and other advocacy organizations, and interested residents.

As SRTS projects move along, the program should not be a surprise to anyone with an interest or responsibility.

## **Flexibility**

SRTS is consistent with New Hampshire's tradition of flexibility and decision-making at the local level. The federal government puts minimal restrictions on the program. A major goal of the program is to encourage

participation by neighborhood schools and their communities - including municipal government - to find solutions that will work at the city or town level.

Between 10 and 30 percent of the federal funds is earmarked for "non-infrastructure" projects that will help educate and encourage children, parents and motorists about safe commuting by foot or bicycle. The balance will be used for "infrastructure" projects, the asphalt and concrete solutions that include sidewalks, bike routes, and safe road crossings.

It is anticipated that local schools, with the support of municipal government, will submit applications for more money than will be available through the federal program. This will create competition among applicants, and we will not be able to approve every project. The application form and review process are designed to allow each school to present its best case for a quality project, while also ensuring that communities with limited resources will be able to participate.

Successful applicants will identify the reasons that more students are not walking or riding bikes and then develop strategies to reverse the trend.

## **The 5Es**

Projects will be evaluated on how well they address the “5Es”:

- **Education**
- **Encouragement**
- **Enforcement**
- **Evaluation**
- **Engineering**

## **Education**

Risks associated with walking or bicycling can be greatly reduced by stressing safe pedestrian and cycling behavior. Such education programs have the secondary benefit in

teaching children about healthy lifestyles and making them aware of environmental issues.

While children should learn safety skills from their parents, school-based programs ensure that all children are exposed to the message. This includes children who live more than two miles from school, outside the target group for the SRTS program.

Safety education programs can range from one-time events like school assemblies to more comprehensive safety instruction integrated into courses in math, science, reading, language arts, geography and health. Safety lessons can be reinforced through school communications systems such as school-wide announcements, signs and posters, and newsletter articles.

Bike and walking organizations and the local police can play a valuable role in the education component. Biking organizations, for example, can help schools find qualified safety instructors. Police in many communities sponsor bike rodeos, one-day events in which children are given both instructions and an opportunity to practice new skills.

More in-depth training stretches for five to 10 hours over several sessions.

## **Encouragement**

More children should be willing to walk or pedal to school if they recognize the idea as fun and cool. Perhaps it was baby boomer parents who came up with the idea of a "Walk and Roll to School Day."

A one-day event can be an excellent way to kick off a local SRTS program. Obviously, a school can expand this approach, running it for a longer period and integrating it with other themes and events, including Earth Day, Bike Month, as well as bicycle-to-work, car-free, and traffic-safety days.

Schools can generate excitement with signs, balloons, banners, and a greeting from school officials and other community leaders when groups of children arrive. It doesn't have to be a fair-weather event. One community encouraged walking and riding in January with a "Polar Bear Walk and Roll" day, greeting arriving children with hot chocolate and a large painting of a polar bear.



Popular approaches include the “walking school bus” and “bicycle trains.” Children from a neighborhood are escorted to school by a volunteer parent, possibly one who would otherwise take time to drive one or two kids. A major advantage of this approach is that it alleviates parental fears that a child walking or pedaling alone could be kidnapped or bullied. Parents have also reported that such community events give them a chance to meet and socialize with neighbors. If walkers and bikers meet at a parking lot or similar gathering place, a walking school bus or bicycle train can include children who live beyond the two-mile radius for the SRTS program.

Mileage clubs and contests can encourage kids to keep up with their new activities. Our state’s SRTS program plans to work in partnership with Walk New Hampshire, which recognizes individuals whose accumulated mileage represents a trip the length or width of the Granite State.

## **Enforcement**

Are speeding motorists putting children at-risk near elementary schools? Do drivers fail to stop at marked

crosswalks? Communities across the country have come up with creative solutions ranging from increased law enforcement and ticketing to Neighborhood Speed Watch activities modeled on the Neighborhood Watch crime-prevention program. Others have had success with a highly publicized "progressive ticketing" approach. Under such a program, increased police visibility is initially augmented by warnings issued to violators. Those who don't get the message will be ticketed and fined. Speed trailers or monitors that display the posted speed limit and a motorist's speed clocked by radar can be an effective deterrent.

Documentation of contact and coordination with local police will draw higher scores for applicants.

## **Evaluation**

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which administers the national SRTS program, is required to make progress reports to Congress. FHWA will accept information on changes in public perception of safety, the effects on students who participate, and increased awareness of safe walking and biking practices.

Schools that compete successfully for reimbursement will calculate the number of students walking or pedaling to school in comparison with students commuting by bus or private car. This will be measured before and after SRTS activities.

Other measurements can include the number of partnerships created through SRTS efforts, the number of schools and/or students reached through the program, affects on air quality and congestion, and the physical improvements such as the number of new facilities or miles of sidewalks and bike routes.

The FHWA is developing additional guidance and standardized forms for data collection.

## **Engineering**

These are the so-called "infrastructure" projects that will require some construction work. Painting crosswalks and erecting new signs are relatively inexpensive projects. Some schools could use SRTS funds to pay for bike racks. Installing or repairing sidewalks linking neighborhoods to schools require a large expenditure. Building a bike path

or painting stripes along a roadway shoulder to mark a safe biking route are possibilities.

Infrastructure projects require the most advance planning and engineering, and projects will be included in the DOT's 10-year Transportation Improvement Plan.

## **Be creative**

The ideas presented here are based on the successes of school communities that have participated in SRTS and similar programs over the years. They are intended as examples to inspire creative thinking. Members of the local task force will have the best ideas about what will work in their particular circumstances.

The objective of the state DOT is to reach as many students as possible, using the best ideas developed at the community level. Some schools may develop good programs that cannot be funded in the initial cycles. We encourage them to do what they can with local resources and to refine their proposals for future rounds of funding.

A new generation of children who grow into active and fit adults, breathing cleaner air while being spared traffic congestion around our schools, will appreciate your efforts in years to come.